

Globe South

THE BOSTON GLOBE THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2014 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/SOUTH

P.1



PHOTOS BY DEBEE TLUMACKI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Duxbury's Shirley Jenkins samples an oyster at the Duxbury Oyster Festival at Winsor House Inn. Below, 12 farms offered their products.

THEIR WORLD IS AN OYSTER



The tasty bivalve is not native
Duxbury Bay, but it thrives on farms

By Shirley Goh
GLOBE STAFF

After leasing a portion of Duxbury Bay from the town, Skip Bennett settled on growing quahogs. Bennett, the son of a Duxbury fisherman, had been told it was a bad idea, and sure enough, his clams died.

He had another plan: oysters. But friends said this foray was crazier than the first. It was the early 1990s, and Bennett was in uncharted territory. Oysters are not native to Duxbury waters and did not grow in the bay.

Through much trial and error, the oyster beds were sown and eventually flourished, and today a wave of oyster growers is following in his footsteps.

"We learned by killing a lot of oysters," said Bennett, owner of Island Creek Oysters. "It was before the Internet, so it was hard to get information."

There are now about 30 oyster farms operating in Duxbury Bay, according to the harbormaster's office. Their handiwork was on display last Sunday, when 12 farms fed a crowd of 300 guests at the Duxbury Oyster Festival, which raised \$7,500 to benefit the Duxbury Student Union.

Under a white tent at the Winsor House Inn, with musical ac-

COMPARING DUXBURY OYSTERS

Oysters grown in Duxbury Bay are of the *Crassostrea virginica* species, commonly known as the eastern oyster. Their taste varies slightly based on which farm grows them. A sampling:

■ **Hungry Pilgrim Oysters.** Have a reputation for being saltier than others, possibly because they are not planted as deep.

■ **Blue Yonder Oyster Farm.** Milder in salinity compared with other Duxbury oysters, with a creamy, buttery texture.

■ **Island Creek Oysters.** Those grown on its harborside site are brinier; oysters from the beach side are sweeter.

SHIRLEY GOH

companiment from a live band, festival-goers sampled the freshly shucked bivalves donated from each farm. Duxbury oysters are known for their sweet-salty balance and buttery texture, though there are minor variations among farms, depending on their location in the bay.

Hungry Pilgrim Oysters is known for salty oysters, possibly the result of their position in the water being not so low, said co-

OYSTERS, Page 6

► OYSTERS

Continued from Page 1

owner Claire Bezdek. She said she is one of two female farmers in the area, conceding that physical factors such as heavy lifting limit the numbers of women in the industry.

Bezdek applied for an aquaculture lease in 2005, and had worked on oyster farms during college. She still works in consulting, but wanted to return to her love of oyster farming. Her friend Will Heward later joined her as co-owner to start Hungry Pilgrim.

"Everyone takes a different path to becoming an oyster farmer, especially in this town," Heward said.

He was a research scientist in New York when he took a leave of absence and returned home to Duxbury, he said, looking to get his hands dirty. The work comes with challenges like harsh winters and major storms, yet he enjoys the isolation and calm of the bay in cold weather.

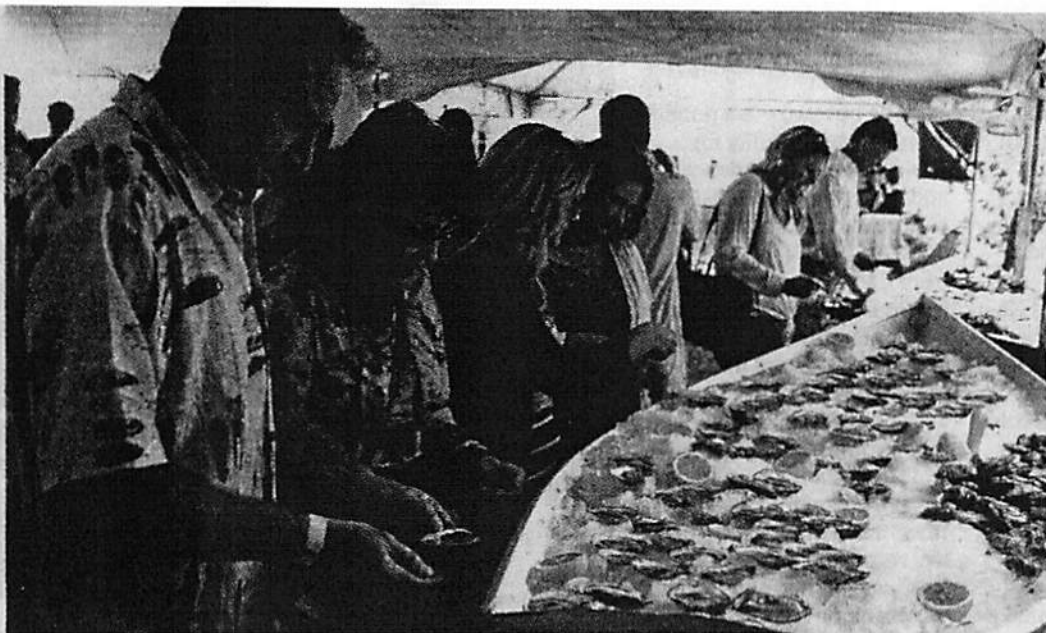
"It's not a 9 to 5," he said. "There's a lot of work we do that we can only do at low tide."

Last year also brought a state-ordered closure of oyster beds in Duxbury and nearby towns for weeks following a bacterial outbreak, leaving farmers hurting from lost revenues. But the maturation of the industry makes farmers better equipped to deal with setbacks. Heward said farmers work with hatcheries to develop disease-resistant oysters, and with regulators on standards of farming.

"Twenty years ago it was the Wild West, and as the industry has grown, so has regulation," he said.

But it was Bennett who started it all. He bought his oyster seed — or tiny baby oysters — from a Maine oyster farmer, Christian Horne, who joined the Island Creek venture.

The seed are grown in tanks, then moved to mesh bags when they get bigger. When they are one to two inches, Bennett said



PHOTOS BY DEBEE TLUMACKI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



Some 300 guests took part in the Duxbury Oyster Festival last Sunday, which raised \$7,500 to benefit the Duxbury Student Union. At left, Skip Bennett, owner of Island Creek Oysters, shucks his product.

brinier, said Charlie White, who summured in Wellfleet while he was growing up and owns Blue Yonder Oyster Farm in Duxbury with his wife, Denise.

Charlie White served in the Air Force and is still a captain at American Airlines.

"Wellfleets are not farmed like we do," he said. "We're able to control the quality, every step of the way."

Some farmers wax poetic about an oyster's "merroir," a play on "terroir" or the soil and climate conditions of grapes that lend their characteristics

supplying to 400 restaurants across the country and buying from other Duxbury growers as well as those in Canada, Virginia, and the West Coast. It has also opened two restaurants, Island Creek Oyster Bar and Row 34 in Boston.

"Production has been tough," Bennett said. "The market has grown phenomenally. We think production is going to outstep demand at some point."

Winsor House Inn buys oysters from Island Creek, as well as Merry Oysters, Old Cove Oyster Co., and Snug Harbor. The inn hosts \$1 oyster nights, and chef Franco Car-

lost the sweetness and nuance of their raw state.

In previous years, Island Creek hosted oyster festivals in Duxbury, drawing as many as 2,000 people in what could be a rowdy event, Carubia said. The affair hosted by Winsor House Inn included the town's other oyster farmers and a smaller guest list.

The chef prefers minimalism when serving oysters. "I like to eat and shuck them as they are, in their perfect, untouched condition," he said. "Let the oyster do the talking."

It is an approach that Bennett, who said a squeeze of lem-

SURJETAJ JOI 8UMW.8 ST UTH.80.1D UTHUUAU